

REPORT OF SUPPORT WORKING GROUP

Molly Ryan and Linda Olson, Coordinators

Members: Karen Hubler, Terry Lopez-Guzman, Jenifer Knight, Karin Troendle, Jim Dean, Gail Lorenz, Manuel Ramos

I. MISSION/GOALS

Our group was created to look into the following issues:

- A. What resources are available or should be developed to assist and further the work of CLS?
- B. What improvements can be made in training in order to meet program and staff needs?
- C. What should the role of SASS be?
- D. How should we share information about experts? Should we develop a mentor program to assist new staff?
- E. How can we increase participation in the task forces? Should there be new substantive task forces?
- F. How can the new CLS web site be used to support the program and staff?

II SUMMARY OF GROUP'S EFFORTS

During our meetings, we discussed the support resources that are currently available as well as those that are needed. There was general consensus that many staff members were unaware of the expertise and valuable materials available within the program. This situation was particularly true in the case of new employees. In addition there seemed to be a need for more guidance by supervisors. Supervisors also need additional training in how to meet staff needs.

Molly circulated a request that individuals in each office share the resource materials that they find most helpful. She compiled this list organized by substantive areas, and we also circulated it to the Task Force coordinators.

Similarly, Linda solicited volunteers for the expertise directory, and compiled the list to be circulated with the staff directory. We discussed, but did not resolve the question as to whether we should also have a list of experts we can consult outside the CLS staff. One method of gathering such names might be to survey staff as to "whom do you consult when you need help with _____" (custody evaluation, real estate appraisal, etc.)

The Task Forces (public benefits, family, consumer and housing) are an excellent way to provide training and support to casehandlers. Some of the task forces meet only sporadically and are not as well attended as they could be. Linda and Karin recruited some staff members willing to serve as Task Force coordinators. Linda agreed to convene a meeting of the Coordinators. That meeting resulted in the adoption of some uniform policies for task force management and the establishment of a year-long task force calendar with a different quarterly meeting each month.

Each coordinator was asked to draft a description of their task force with an eye to developing an informational flyer which might be utilized to increase task force membership. We also agreed to publicize the agenda in advance to increase interest in upcoming meetings.

We obtained information about setting up conference calls and circulated that to Task Force coordinators and others, to maximize participation of staff in meetings, trainings, etc.. We would also like to increase participation in the listserv as an excellent method of sharing information about significant legal developments, as well as a way of receiving input on problematic cases. The Volunteer Newsletter is another means of sharing information among staff scattered in different offices.

We discussed the fact that some staff members still have questions about SASS (Statewide Advocacy Support Staff), and how to utilize the senior attorneys effectively. Manuel, Joel and Linda agreed to redraft and recirculate a memo describing the unit and offering to provide assistance to casehandlers.

We talked at length about some of the difficulties and problems that new staff often experience in starting a new job at CLS. Jenifer, Terry and Karen worked together to gather copies of forms and materials new staff members need, and to develop a checklist of materials and matters which should be discussed with all new staff members.

It was also felt that new staff could use the assistance of a mentor who could provide advice and support and who did not have the role of day-to-day supervision. Jim and Linda drafted a description of a mentoring program which could be utilized by CLS staff.

Volunteers are a source of support for staff in all offices, and they also need training and support themselves. Gail and Annette are planning on developing a year-long calendar of upcoming training events and inviting staff in other offices to share in the training. Much of the training is over the lunch hour and provides a 45 minute overview of a wide variety of topics. It was felt that many other staff members, particularly secretaries, paralegals and receptionists in other offices would find these trainings useful.

Training events are sometimes not as well attended or utilized by staff as they could be. Regular meetings with supervisors as well as attendance at task force meetings could help staff recognize their training needs. There was some discussion about the advisability of establishing a CLS training committee (once the three programs are officially merged) to circulate information about training opportunities, encourage staff participation, and monitor utilization.

Additional training for supervising and managing attorneys regarding how to provide quality supervision to staff was discussed. Molly and Manuel agreed to review and screen some of the written materials already available regarding supervision and to discuss the issue at a management meeting. The group considered whether a half-day or longer training session for supervisors might be advisable. There was also some discussion of the need for recognition and non-monetary awards for staff doing good work.

We also discussed the value of the new web site and the role it can play in providing additional support for staff. Molly French is also meeting with the task forces and other offices to discuss their ideas for materials to be included in the website. She can utilize the resource list draft that Molly Ryan developed as she considers what material should be included in the CLS website.

III WORKING GROUP PRODUCTS

- A. Draft of written resource list (this will be more fully developed by Molly French, the Web Content Coordinator).
- B. Description of CLS Mentoring Program
- C. CLS Mentoring Program Expectations
- D. Orientation Checklist for New Staff

IV RATIONALE

The purpose of the Resource List is to advise staff of the names of the most valuable written resources in the various substantive law areas handled by the different offices. In some instances there are core resources that each casehandler who handles a large volume of certain types of cases should have immediately available. In other cases, when the topic is handled only occasionally, for example, it is useful just to know the names of the resource and where it can be located if necessary.

The mentoring program would be available to all new staff. It is a voluntary program. Each new staff member would be offered the opportunity to be assigned a mentor, who would assist in the transition to CLS by providing emotional support and guidance for the first six months of employment. A description of the mentoring program and expectations would be included in the orientation packet.

The new staff orientation packet, including an orientation checklist and copies of all key forms and documents would be provided to all new staff members on their first day of employment. Generally the managing attorney would review the packet with the new employee, or another staff member could be designated to assist. Each line should be initialed and dated by the new employee when the information or material is obtained. In addition, outside offices and each Denver substantive unit may wish to create additional checklists or orientation materials specific to their situation.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS OF GROUP

- A. Regarding Resources, the group has provided the first draft of written resource materials to Molly French and it is recommended that Molly work with the various task forces to flesh and prioritize the list and eventually add the materials to the website. Also, the CLS Expertise Directory was finalized and has been included in the back of the CLS Directory booklet and distributed to all staff.

B. Regarding Training as it relates to managing and supervising attorneys, the group recommends that two documents regarding legal supervision, entitled, “The Supervisor As Teacher,” and “The Role of the Supervisor” be distributed to all managing/supervising attorneys and that training on these materials take place.

With regard to training new staff, the group recommends that the Orientation Checklist for New Staff that our group developed be distributed to all offices (with an explanatory cover sheet) for the purpose of ensuring uniformity and thoroughness in the introduction of crucial materials to new staff members.

With regard to ongoing staff training needs, it is recommended that a statewide training committee take on a more involved role in broader training issues in addition to reviewing individual staff training requests.

C. Regarding Mentor Program, it is recommended that the mentor program as more fully described in Attachments B and C be implemented as soon as possible.

VI NEXT STEPS

Some issues remain for the program to address including the following:

1. Expansion of the Resource List and incorporation into the CLS website.
2. Development and circulation of task force recruitment flyer to increase staff participation.
3. Creation of CLS training committee.
4. Recruitment of volunteer for Mentoring Coordinator position.
5. Review of orientation packet for corrections or omissions, and development of supplemental packet particular to individual offices or units.
6. Establishment of a training for CLS supervisors.
7. Draft and circulate SASS memo